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Increased Cooperation with Libya cannot Proceed without Human Rights Guarantees

(Brussels, 15 October) EU relations with Libya must reflect the serious and ongoing human rights concerns in the country, says Amnesty International as EU Foreign Ministers prepare to give the European Commission a mandate to deepen relations with Libya.

In a letter sent to EU Ministers (see www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International recalled the concerns it presented in July when, following the release of the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor, the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Libyan government which made no reference to human rights principles.

“The EU must resist the temptation of softening its standards and demands on account of the outcome of the medical workers case. On the contrary, if lessons are to be learned from this, it is that human rights must be at the forefront of any future engagements with Libya,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

Libya's track record of human rights remains very poor. Each month, Amnesty International is alerted to new cases of journalists and dissidents who - without the media and political pressure that was seen in the case of the medical workers - are denied a fair judicial process.

The human rights organization is also very worried about the agreements between the EU and Libya in the context of irregular migration. It notes once again that Libya is still not a party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and that UNHCR cannot operate freely in the country.

There are no provisions in the national legislation to allow asylum seekers to present their case and the detention conditions of “illegal migrants” are reported to be deplorable, with expulsions of large numbers of people occurring regularly with no attention to protection needs.

“The violations occurring in Libya are so blatant that the EU must move beyond the approach adopted in the Memorandum, which effectively ignored major human rights concerns” added Oosting.

Amnesty International therefore calls on EU Ministers to ensure that any future engagements with Libya will make explicit reference to human rights guarantees and urges them to refrain from giving the European Commission a negotiation mandate that does not take this into account.